Instructional Models

How to Choose One *and How to* Use One

Elizabeth Ross HUBBELL | Bryan GOODWIN

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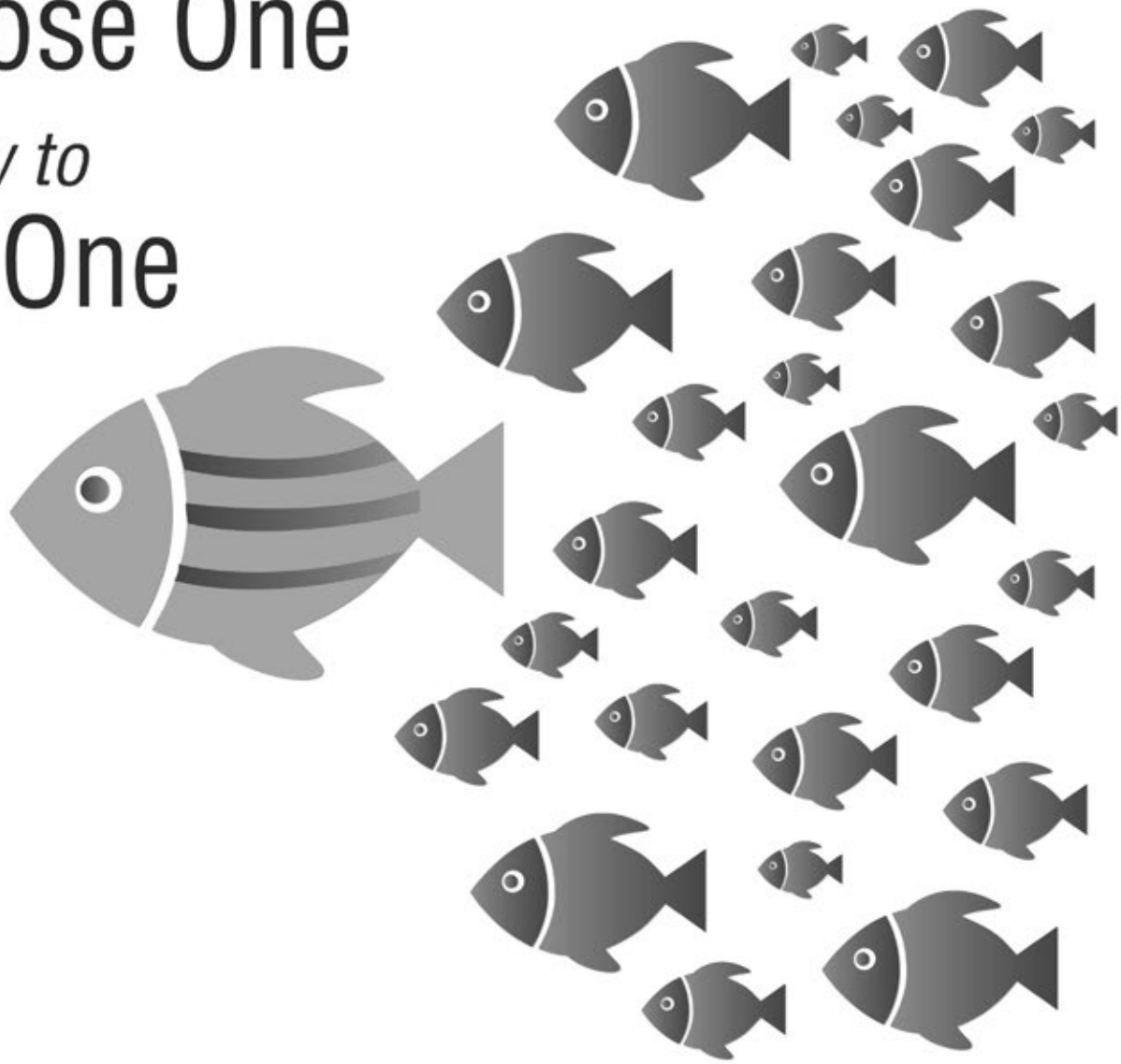

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How to Choose One *and How to* Use One

List of Tools

Introduction: Getting it right from the beginning

The idea for this book was born out of our many years of serving as consultants and seeing the promise and peril of instructional models—the powerful gains schools can experience when they use instructional models to support greater consistency in teaching quality as well as the myriad ways in which these efforts can come off the rails.

The schools and districts that had the most success started with a needs assessment to determine what model would best suit their needs. They were careful to get input from all levels of faculty and staff. Most importantly, they were strategic in their timing and training to ensure the change effort had the best chance of success. Finally, they implemented both formative and summative evaluation methods to track the success and impact of their framework.

While these steps seem simple and intuitive, it's easy to dismiss their importance when there is so much work to be done and so little time in the school year to do it. We watch students and teachers struggle and we want to do something *right away* to be helpful.

How we've designed this book

This book should be a companion as you implement a schoolwide instructional model. The first two chapters establish why instructional models are so important—and why organizational challenges can put them out of reach. True to our belief in the power of checklists as do-confirm lists (reminding us of what's most important) (Goodwin & Hubbell, 2013), each subsequent chapter will include a series of steps or actions that we recommend for success and tools to help you accomplish them.

◊ Step 1: Choosing the right model for you

We first recommend that you take a broad survey of the instructional models that are available. In chapter 3, we provide a brief overview of several current and classic instructional models and suggestions for the problems they are designed to solve. This book is designed to be model-agnostic—to be used with whichever model you deem most fitting to your current needs. The chapter also provides suggestions for how to make this choice. One mistake school leaders often make is not getting enough input and perspectives on the choice of model. We see this happening often: A school leader learns of a new model, gets excited about it, and tries to force the model on his or her faculty.

What we have found to be much more successful is when a designated team of educators first conducts a needs assessment in order to identify their key issues in instruction, then does a thorough audit of the research and tools that are available to help them solve their problem. This chapter will provide suggested procedures and tools for doing so.

◊ Step 2: Planning for successful professional learning

Another common error is cramming the professional learning into one or two intense sessions. Changing practice and seeing the impact your instructional modifications have on student learning takes time and focus. We have found the most successful implementations have started with a broad overview followed by small, "bite-sized" professional learning sessions, each with time to implement, experiment, and reflect on what was learned. These are ideally run through professional learning communities that are built around collegial discussions and reflection. So chapter 4 provides a suggested timeline for implementing an instructional model. In this chapter, we will go through the roles and responsibilities of leaders during an implementation, from principal to staff development coordinators to teacher leaders. For any initiative to be successful, your instructional leaders need to be as knowledgeable, if not more so, on the chosen model as your faculty. This chapter will outline suggestions for training your instructional leaders and their various roles as the model is implemented. There is also a section that describes how to implement at a larger level, such as district or systemwide.

◊ Step 3: Managing and overcoming resistance to change

No matter how good the model, how much input you solicit from faculty, or how open-minded your educators, there will always be stumbling blocks as you implement change. In chapter 5, we help you identify the reason for the challenge, whether it is from fear of change, lack of knowledge, or a philosophical disagreement. Your initiative's success will depend on having a critical mass of your faculty on board. This chapter provides steps to help you get there.

◊ Step 4: Measuring progress toward success

Drawing from Covey's (1989) philosophy of beginning with the end in mind, in chapter 6 we provide suggestions for identifying your criteria for success. We recommend this be a collaborative effort with faculty, instructional leaders, and school leaders. By agreeing as a group on success criteria, leadership teams can set the expectation from the very beginning that the effort reflects a professional learning community holding one another accountable while supporting each other along the way.

◊ Step 5: Building on your foundation

No matter how impactful your instructional model is, there will come a point when either the initiative no longer needs such intense focus because it has become a part of the organizational norms, or you're ready to *adapt* the model you've adopted, making shared changes to your approach. Or new challenges may emerge that prompt you to recalibrate your priorities in order to address them. Chapter 7 will help you make such decisions with integrity and transparency.

◊ Extra material: If you're on your own

Most of this book assumes that a school leader (or leadership team) is guiding the effort with the positional authority and influence to make change happen. Sometimes, though, an individual faculty member, teacher leader, or small group of teachers may become convinced that a consistent instructional design model is a solution to a school's challenges, yet struggle to get others interested in learning more about the model. The appendix will help those who are operating on their own and must influence without positional authority.

Enjoy the journey!

We are excited that you have chosen to take this journey with us to better meet the needs of your students and teachers. Following these steps, we feel confident that you can make an impact on student learning while also creating a dynamic professional learning organization. Let's dive in! 

Chapter 1: The power of instructional design models

For as long as most educators can remember, schools nearly everywhere have engaged in the annual ritual of drafting hefty school improvement plans. These often include literally dozens of things school leaders commit their teams to doing in an effort to improve student outcomes—or at least to persuade the powers that be that they are busily going about the business of improvement.

There's just one problem.

Too often, those improvement plans don't translate into noticeable improvement that can be sustained over time, despite the best intentions and efforts by teachers and principals. Nationwide, after initial gains under the high-stakes testing regime of No Child Left Behind, scores on the National Assessment of Educational Program (NAEP) have plateaued.

So then, too many politicians and news stories would have us believe, our nation's schools must be predominantly bad, right?

Not so fast.

Our experience over decades of visiting and working with hundreds of schools far and wide tells us that it's actually pretty hard to find a thoroughly bad school. Most teachers in most schools do, in fact, know how to teach. Most principals do, in fact, know how to keep a campus running. Most schools are, in fact, really trying hard to do the right things for their students.

But if they're mostly doing the right things, then why aren't more schools able to make significant gains in achievement, and hold on to them?

Maybe it's because those small errors, the not quite doing the right things right, add up over the course of a school year.

We believe this to be the case.

Ours is not a merely philosophical stance nor wishful thinking, but rather, an empirical judgment born out of working with and analyzing schools nationwide that have significantly improved student learning. Not by forcing students to drop out, firing hordes of teachers, adopting high-tech gadgetry, or getting students to sit in straight rows and chant along with the teachers, but rather, by simply getting everyone in the school focused on doing one thing that matters most. As it turns out, that *one thing*—that single, critical leverage point for improving

schools—can be easy to overlook, often because it remains hidden in plain sight. Uncover it, and your school or district will start doing the right things right.

Quality instruction in every classroom

Years ago, researchers in Louisiana (Reynolds, Stringfield, & Schaffer, 2001) sent observers out to a collection of schools that were alike in nearly every respect, serving similar students in similar communities with similar levels of funding. There was just one difference. In one set of schools, students were performing at much *higher* levels than expected; in the other set of schools, students were performing at much *lower* levels. In hopes of discovering what distinguished the two groups, the researchers asked the observers (mostly non-educator laypeople) to tour the schools, record their observations, and report back what they saw.

To avoid biasing the observers, the researchers kept it a secret which schools were higher- and which were lower-performing. Interestingly, nearly all of the observers could identify the better-performing schools. Bear in mind, they had no obvious clues to tip them off. The higher-performing schools weren't any wealthier, nor did they serve more privileged students than the lower-performing ones. Nor were they bedecked with high-tech gadgets or engaged in the latest reform du jour. In fact, as the researchers put it, they were as "plain vanilla" as could be.

So, what were they doing differently?

Simply this: *They were focused on delivering consistent, high-quality instruction*. In the high-performing schools, observers saw teachers providing challenging, engaging instruction and students focused on learning *in every classroom*. Meanwhile, in the low-performing schools, there were some great teachers sprinkled here and there, to be sure. Yet often, in the very next classroom, they'd see uninspiring instruction and off-task student behaviors. In short, to paraphrase Forrest Gump, classrooms in low-performing schools were like a box of chocolates: "You never know what you're gonna get."

International researchers discovered something similar when comparing the differences between high-performing school systems and mediocre ones. As it turns out, the most salient feature of high-performing school systems was the presence of *consistent* instructional quality. As the researchers wrote, "Top-performing systems recognize that the only way to improve outcomes is to improve instruction; learning occurs when teachers and students interact, and thus to improve learning implies improving the quality of that interaction" (Barber & Mourshed, 2007, p. 26).

Sadly, such consistency is far from reality in U.S. schools. While examining the educational experiences of nearly 1,000 elementary students from across the U.S., a team at the University of Virginia (Pianta, Belsky, Houts, & Morrison, 2007) found wide variance in the quality of instruction these students were receiving. In fact, only *7% of students* received high-quality instruction and emotional support in all three grade levels they studied (first, third, and fifth). Moreover, in disproportionate numbers, low-income students were far more likely than higher-income students to experience weak instruction and emotional support in their classrooms.

Ending chutes and ladders

What all of this suggests is that an important key—indeed, perhaps *the most important key*—to improving school performance is guaranteeing that every classroom in the school provides high-quality learning experiences for students so that their success isn't left to chance or the luck of the draw based upon their placement in teachers' classrooms. For too many students, though, schools often reflect something of a cruel game of chutes and ladders; one year they get a good teacher and climb to new heights of learning, then the very next year, they receive ineffective instruction and slide right back down again. Sadly, as William Sanders (Sanders & Rivers, 1996) discovered years ago when analyzing student performance across multiple grade levels, receiving an ineffective teacher three years in a row—riding a three-year chute downwards—can result in a loss of learning from which students never recover.

So, if this seems obvious enough—that consistent, high-quality teaching is the key to a good school—why is it so hard to make it happen?

Missing the mark

For starters, a perennial problem in education is that, as numerous studies have found, professional learning (PL) for teachers—sending teachers to hours of workshops, seminars, or giving them online tools and teacher videos in the name of improving their professional practice—typically does little to change teachers' practice.

Another common fix—teacher evaluation systems—has generated similarly disappointing results. Over the past decade or more, districts nearly everywhere have developed or adopted newfangled systems to evaluate teacher performance based on complex calculations of student growth and teachers' ability to incorporate multiple, often dozens, of elements of effective teaching into their classrooms. It all seems sensible enough—turn up the heat on teachers and they'll teach better. Right?

Perhaps not. Few studies to date have shown that the enormous time and energy devoted to implementing these systems have done much to improve teaching practice or raise student achievement (Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, & Rothstein, 2012). At issue may be the fact that teacher evaluation instruments are often, in the words of school improvement consultant and author Mike Schmoker (2014), so "complex," "bloated," and "jargon-laced" that they fail to provide teachers with much clarity about how to design and deliver better learning experiences for students. In short, while these complex systems may give teachers and principals plenty to worry about and discuss, they're often so broad and complicated that they fail to provide specific guidance or clarity about what good instruction looks like in the classroom. More to the point, rarely do these systems describe how teachers ought to sequence learning to help students acquire new knowledge and skills, providing them with, in a word, a *model* for teaching and learning.

The difference between frameworks and models

At this point, you may be thinking, *No, we have that. We have the [fill in the blank] teacher evaluation system.* Here, we want to be clear: Most teacher evaluation systems *aren't actually*

instructional models, but, at best, frameworks of teaching practice. We know it may sound like we're splitting hairs, so bear with us as we spend a moment to parse the difference between two terms that get used interchangeably, yet have decidedly different meanings.

Frameworks arrange and structure declarative (factual) knowledge into categories, taxonomies, or mental "buckets." In literature, for example, we use a mental framework to distinguish among various genres of fiction (mystery, action, romance, and so forth). In biology, we use a taxonomy first developed by Aristotle to categorize different types of living organisms (plants, mammals, reptiles, fish, and so on). With this in mind, we can see that most teacher evaluation systems are *frameworks* that categorize the myriad things we want teachers to attend to in their classrooms and professional lives; they clarify *what* to do, yet not necessarily *how* to do it.

Models, on the other hand, explain how things work, often by describing a process, cycle, or sequence of events. For example, meteorologists understand the water cycle as a shared mental model that describes how water evaporates from the ocean, condenses into clouds, and returns to the earth as precipitation. Similarly, astronomers use a model of the solar system to understand and describe how planets rotate on their axes and revolve around the sun and how moons revolve around planets and so on. In film and theater, playwrights and screenwriters often follow the model of a three-act play to sequence a series of scenes into narratives with rising action, conflict, resolution, and denouement. Mental models help us understand abstract processes. They can also be used to replicate works based on a theory.

In fact, for many intellectual endeavors, models provide us with examples to follow or emulate. To further illustrate this difference, McREL has actually created both a *framework for instruction* and a *model for learning*. In *Classroom Instruction That Works* (Dean, Hubbell, Pitler, & Stone, 2012) we grouped 23 high-yield instructional strategies into nine categories of effective instruction and ultimately the following three-component **framework**:

1. Creating the environment for learning
2. Helping students develop understanding, and
3. Helping students extend and apply knowledge.

This framework, however, doesn't *describe* the process of learning or how the strategies could be sequenced to support the process of learning; rather, it's designed to help educators go from having a disorganized "grab bag" of teaching tips and tricks to a more organized and robust toolkit of research-based strategies to apply in their classrooms.

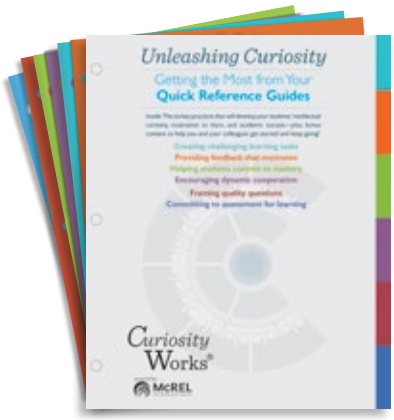
We know from working with thousands of educators worldwide that this framework has been immensely helpful to arrange and sharpen their thinking about pedagogy. However, it doesn't describe *how* to sequence teaching strategies into lessons or unit design (or *why* these strategies work or *when* to use them).

In a recent white paper and forthcoming book, *Student Learning That Works*, we provide educators with a six-phase **model** for lesson and unit design based on the science of learning—in particular, what cognitive scientists call the *information processing model*. As a model, it shows the sequence of mental activities—from start to finish—required for students to turn new information into long-term memory. See the table on p. 8 for an alignment of *Classroom Instruction That Works* to a learning model.

Interested in more resources?

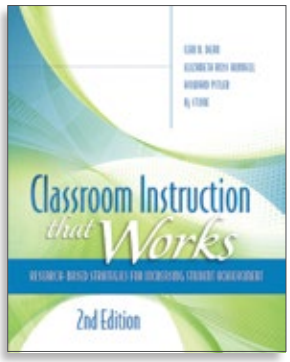
Visit store.mcrel.org for these and other resources!

Readers of this book know better than anyone that instructional excellence takes commitment, collegiality, and expert guidance. That's why McREL is here! You'll find all our research-backed, practice-proven books and guides at **store.mcrel.org**.



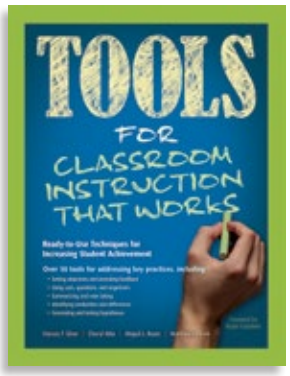
Unleashing Curiosity quick guide series

Teachers around the world are finding McREL's *Unleashing Curiosity* quick guides as inspiring as they are handy: eight pages packed with effective classroom practices supported by research and theory. All six guides are now available in a value set that includes bonus content to help you and your colleagues support one another as you dig into six key practices. Where you start is less important than where you finish: in a *student-owned and teacher-guided* learning environment.



Classroom Instruction That Works

This is one of the most widely used books for increasing student achievement for good reason: It provides evidence-based insights from rigorous research to strengthen instructional planning and delivery. You'll understand *why* and *how* the nine research-based teaching strategies presented in the book work best for specific situations and see how these methods connect directly to students gaining key 21st-century skills. Learn how to select the teaching techniques that will work best in your classroom to heighten engagement and deepen understanding for your students.



Tools for Classroom Instruction That Works

When McREL published *Classroom Instruction That Works*, we encouraged a generation of educators to focus instruction around nine categories of teaching strategies proven to raise student achievement. The challenge for teachers has always been *how* to build these achievement-boosting strategies into their everyday instruction. This book provides more than 50 classroom-ready tools that make it easy to implement the strategies across grade levels and content areas. By incorporating these tools into your daily practice, you can turn your classroom into a place where high levels of engagement and deep learning happen every day.

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How to Choose One *and How to* Use One

Your school is doing all the right things. So why won't student achievement budge? Maybe the key is doing the right things *right*. You may be lacking a straightforward yet powerful tool that can work wonders in aligning expectations and talents: an instructional model.

The research leaves little doubt: *Instructional models work*. Join Elizabeth Ross Hubbell and Bryan Goodwin as they explore the variety of instructional models available to today's educators and explain how they can unite the faculty and students in identifying—and achieving—classroom goals.

If managing this change in your school or district seems like a heavy lift, fear not: Hubbell and Goodwin take you step by step through a process that turns doubters into doers.

Now's the time to turn your school into a school that really works! An instructional model may be just the tool your school has been waiting for.

Learn more at:

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